

Performer at this year's AGM

Spirit met her dance partner, Viv Moore, at a workshop put on by the Toronto Theatre Alliance (TTA). Spirit says that she would not have been as interested if the participants were only performers with disabilities. "My life isn't about being disabled, but about integration, and that's why I dance with able-bodied partners. I think integration is important, so that we can work together and create harmony... The responses to the power of the piece from people of all walks of life were refreshing; it showed me there is room for this kind of work."

In addition to dancing on stage, Spirit also danced in a film entitled *In Search of Joy* to the improvised music of a drum and a fiddle; dance, however, is not the only talent Spirit showcased in the performance. She has also taught Wen-do, a technique for women's self-defense and empowerment, and adapted the course to suit the needs of women with disabilities.

Audience members allowing their eyes to search the stage would see a painting by Spirit in the background. Around the edge is a circle in a square and inside it are two sets of legs. Both partners are sitting, and one is massaging the other. Spirit reveals that the hands providing comfort represent a relationship she once had with a partner who died.

In Spirit's words, the painting is, "tangible evidence of someone accepting and loving my body just as it is."

When Spirit performs, painting, dance and music form a separate world, rich in tones, nuances and meaning. Definitions blur; full possibilities come to the forefront as the lights fadeout.



Spirit Synott, performs at this years Annual General Meeting, September 27, 2001, Southshore Community Centre.

DANCE FOR PEOPLE with physical disabilities is starting to develop in Canada. It has already gained momentum in the United States under the leadership of Mary Verdi Fletcher, a dancer with spina bifida, who founded *Dancing Wheels* in 1980, with the support of the Cleveland ballet.

Recently Frank Hull received a week-long scholarship to take a *Dancing Wheels* workshop in Cleveland. In Frank's word, he "fell in love with *Dancing Wheels*."

But dancers with disabilities wishing to study in Cleveland face many issues. It is hard to get permission for foreigners to work legally in the States. Frank Hull, being part Aboriginal Canadian, had no legal problem working there; however he did have problems with accessible housing and health coverage which both represent significant challenges to people with disabilities in the United States.

As for the theatre scene in Toronto, there are very few accessible spaces. Art-

word Theatre and Betty Olliphant where these performances took place are among the few. Spirit Synott and Mark Brose developed their techniques at a dance workshop at the Toronto Theatre Alliance. Perhaps the biggest barrier in Canada, like any issue related to disability, has to do with attitudes. Dancing is not a gentle art. Dancers with or without disabilities get injured regularly: pulled muscles, dislocated shoulders, charley horses... they are all part of the job. The tendency in our society is to be overprotective of people with disabilities. As with anything else, there is a balance that needs to be made, where all dancers can make individual decisions about which limitations can realistically be challenged.

"I'm proud of my rug-burns. I'm proud of my injuries," Frank Hull boasts.

"The chair's not so fragile and neither am I," Spirit says matter-of-factly.

"I'm just having a great time," Mark admits.

With time, dancers with disabilities will develop an audience in Canada. Spirit and Mark performed their pieces with the Fringe Festival of Independent Dance Artists; the responses were incredibly positive. As new possibilities emerge for people with disabilities in the workforce, why shouldn't professional dancers be a part of that?

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